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C O N F I D E N T I A L MASERU 000129

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/S, DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA, AND DS/DSS/CC
PRETORIA FOR DATT AND ORI
CAPE TOWN FOR ORI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/30/2019

TAGS: PGOV ASEC LT

SUBJECT: LESOTHO'S NATIONAL SECURITY SERVICE NAMES ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT MASTERMIND

REF: Maseru 126 and previous

CLASSIFIED BY: Elizabeth C. Power, Deputy Chief of Mission.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) On Wednesday, April 29, Lesotho's National Security Service (NSS) allowed post's RSO to read a classified NSS document stating that they have identified the mastermind behind the April 22 attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister.

According to NSS information, local businessman Jersey Ramakatane organized the attack, with another Mosotho national, Geffory Baloyi, serving as the attack commander on the ground. NSS states that Baloyi recruited the assailants, including the two South Africans and five Mozambicans, then brought them all to a farm in South Africa's Free State on April 12. After receiving military-style training there, the assailants then came to Lesotho and carried out the attack on April 22. The NSS further claims that Makotoko Lerotholi (reftel) provided the attackers with a map and other information relating to Makoanyane military barracks, where the attackers stole weapons and vehicles; there was also a serving member of the Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) who assisted the attackers at Makoanyane. Apparently Ramakatane's intent was to capture the Prime Minister and take him to a local radio station, where he would be forced to announce his resignation over the air. The NSS did not make clear whether Ramakatane would then have attempted to install himself as head of government. Post's Political Assistant also heard elements of this theory from a contact within the governing Lesotho Congress for Democracy, who stated that he had also received the information from the NSS.

¶2. (C) Ramakatane is a local property developer and businessman who owns several retail stores and buildings in Maseru. He is rumored to have been a hitman prior to investing in businesses, and he is alleged to have engaged in unscrupulous behavior to build up his business. He has been a member of the Basotho National Party, which is now a junior opposition party, but he was never recognized as an active or vocal supporter of the party and has never engaged in the political sphere. In 2008, Ramakatane fled Lesotho following speculation that he had been linked to the 2007 attacks on ministers; he is rumored to have been living in South Africa for the last year. The NSS document stated that Ramakatane's motive was that he had failed to obtain some GOL contracts in the recent past.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Post's contacts find Ramakatane to be a credible culprit behind the assassination attempt, given his allegedly violent background and possible involvement in the 2007 attacks. Lerotholi's involvement in planning the attack is more likely than his actual physical participation in it, given his reported ill health, although as the NSS stated, there must have been LDF insiders involved, as well, since Lerotholi left the military over 10 years ago. With Ramakatane's largely apolitical background, the GOL's repeated mention of the political opposition party, All Basotho Convention, as the culprit may simply be an attempt to hide the true focus of their

investigation.

¶4. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Post has developed very good relations with Lesotho's NSS. With the strong support of the Office of Regional Issues in Pretoria and Cape Town, a team came to Maseru last year to provide training to 20 up-and-coming NSS officers. The focus of this training was anti-terrorism and transnational crime, and it was actively supported by the NSS hierarchy. The sharing of information with post's RSO is a clear indication of the NSS's appreciation of this ORI-sponsored training.

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